

## Consolidated Summary of PROBE Feedback Sessions

*The last question of the PROBE instrument is: "Is input regularly sought, gathered and reviewed to address any deficiencies in customer service or address any changes in programmatic circumstances?" In an effort to practice what we preach, GEFP held four feedback sessions on March 2, 5, 7, and 9, 2007 to ask other agencies what they thought about the PROBE process. Here is what they said:*

### **Communication**

- Have an initial session for all agencies to set expectations. Rollout of the PROBE process was vague. Agencies were concerned about the motive behind the process and potential consequences of the evaluation.
  - Agency did not know who to have present in the program review interview sessions. In retrospect, the agency believes it should have had more technical people involved in the interview.
  - A clearly defined plan with steps and timelines should be provided to set expectations.
  - People didn't understand the process and some went to the internet to look up similar programs
  - People didn't understand the process and some staff are just now figuring out what it means
  - An interview before the PROBE would be helpful
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- Agency felt slighted on their rebuttal to the PROBE document and the agency improvement plan. It did not believe their scores were adequately explained.
  - After the PROBE program evaluations are given to each agency, a meeting could be held to discuss results before they become final.
  - Exit conferences could give agency chance to correct any miscommunication
  - Exit conference would have given agency the opportunity to clarify
  - Better explanation of what would be in the public document as opposed to the actual PROBE
  - More notice of when the document would become public and what would be included
  - No notification when report would become public
  - Review results and recommendations with agencies before releasing to the public
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- Please provide examples of good outcome measures or metrics
  - Have a metrics session. These sessions could be one-on-one sessions between the agency and GEFP or multi-agency sessions if they have similar traits (e.g., grant programs)
  - Staff development program for agency employees who take part in the PROBE process so that state personnel get the big picture
  - Training and consulting for the PROBE should be available
  - Form groups for agencies to sit down and talk about best practices and priorities

- Identify a single owner of the PROBE process. All communication should go through or be coordinated with that person. The owner should be a high level individual in agency – deputy commissioner or agency head. That person should be the internal champion for the process at the agency.
- Having a point-person at an agency is desirable
- There was poor communication with agencies in coordinating the process
- PROBE was not consistent in its application
- GEFP was not consistent in scoring; could be trained to look at results and be more consistent on peer review
- GEFP staff was open and came to several meetings
- In some PROBE reviews, specific follow-up questions were asked to clarify points from the interviews. This was very helpful from the agency perspective.
- Budget analysts had information that would have been helpful and could have been included more
- Many agencies were implementing new strategic plans due to new administration and new people, may have been penalized for trying to make change
- How many of the recommendations will be followed through (or will it just sit on someone's desk and never be used)?
- Have a mid-process review for new participants that have come into the process
- PROBE process should be perpetual, agencies should constantly be moving in the right direction
- Don't set bar so low that agencies reach it (give them a reason to aim high)
- Programs should be defined by agency mission and not by a fund center
- GEFP came in with pre-conceived notion of what an agency did and evidence didn't change it
- Provide a summary of PROBE feedback session comments on GEFP website.

### **PROBE Tool**

- Allow partial credit on first three sections
- "Yes" or "no" questions did not leave room for any shades of gray
- Questions are too broad.
- Consider splitting questions into discrete pieces rather than asking multiple items. Weighting does not need to be evenly distributed, e.g. Does the program collect data (5pts)? Has the program provided evidence that data collected is used in the management decision making process (15pts)?
- Onus should be on GEFP to communicate expectations for evidence
- Expansion of explanations and what is needed to get to "yes"

- Some forms of duplication or redundancy is outside of the agencies' control (sometimes due to legislative requirements)
  - Not fair that "No" evaluations on some questions impact other questions.
  - Things are measured that agency management cannot control, such as state statute.
  - Agencies were not informed that PROBE would include factors out of their control (due to political considerations, federal laws, etc.)
  - Agencies cannot control legislative requirements and it shouldn't be held against them
  - Identification of legislative limitations (design flaws) can be helpful for agencies if they are shared
  - What does the scoring really mean?
  - Share the rubric with agencies
  - People working on the PROBE from agencies need a clarification of the terms
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- Have multiple templates for different types of agencies.
  - One-size-fits-all model may not fit all agencies equally
  - One-size-fits-all approach was difficult for some agencies and forced them to fit themselves into the PROBE questions
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- It can be difficult to capture prevention measures (no deaths or accidents, etc.)
  - Provide credit for lack of complaints about a program
  - Add narrative at the beginning of the form to summarize contemporary program issues (leadership and mission changes)
  - Allow self-evaluation by the agency
  - Allow variable weighting of programs within a single agency. Most important programs should be weighted more heavily.
  - Large time lapse between fieldwork and seeing the results
  - One 90-minute session is not enough
  - Some agencies that had a high PART score did not do well on the PROBE
  - Definition of programs were problematic; work with agencies on identifying
  - Program definitions should be coordinated with the agency and changed from fund centers
  - There was no input from the public
  - PROBE doesn't capture the future plans of a program
  - Agencies that were in transition felt the PROBE was punitive
  - Others said that adequate opportunity was given to review and provide rebuttal
  - Considering it was the first time for the PROBE, things came out well and it is being taken in the right direction from the federal PART

### **Other Concerns**

- Requests to conduct sessions on metrics.
- Some areas of state government are intangible and metrics should reflect that
- We can get quantitative measures easily, but need help in developing qualitative measures

- Some agencies already have measures, how can they make sure they reflect what PROBE is looking for?
- Would like help developing program measures
- Questions were not asked about agency long term mission or plans
- How are PROBE questions used to influence recommendations?
- PROBE process should be institutionalized rather than a one-off endeavor
- Provide a 60-day blackout window prior to budget request due date with no activities related to PROBE.
- Some were curious to know how other agencies coordinated their staff for fieldwork
- Is there a set schedule for next round of PROBE's?
- Explanation of statutory barriers when creating measures with agency
- How do we communicate the complex programs to the public?
- Agencies need help to coordinate with one another toward achieving large complex goals for the public good (ex. Safer roads)
- Process is going to be positive for agencies in the long term
- Maybe start with group sessions or a conference before doing fieldwork
- Some problems could be resolved by defining programs by mission areas